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HURRY, HURRY, HURRY

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

LE ROY ARNOLD

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HURRY, HURRY, HURRY

CHARACTERS

JACK CRANDALL.....	<i>Cow boy-author</i>
MR. HOOKER.....	<i>Business man</i>
STEPHEN HOOKER.....	<i>College freshman</i>
TED STONE.....	<i>Football hero</i>
ALSIUS BARTHOLOMEW.....	<i>College professor</i>
FLOY HOOKER.....	<i>Vivacious debutante</i>
LETITIA BROWN.....	<i>Languishing dilettante</i>
MRS. HOOKER.....	<i>Modern mother</i>
RITA.....	<i>Pert housemaid</i>

ACT I. Living room of the HOOKER mansion,
in the big American city, Middle
West. Present time—late after-
noon, a few days before Christmas.

ACT II. Same as ACT I. Evening.

ACT III. Same as ACT II. Just before midnight.

HURRY, HURRY, HURRY

ACT I

SCENE: *Living room of the HOOKER mansion. Late afternoon, a few days before Christmas. One large doorway, portières open, discloses the hall with its stairway and a telephone conspicuously placed. Another large doorway opens into the billiard room, and a small door opens into the study. The living room, with its costly mahogany, consistent color scheme, paintings, hangings, and softly shaded lights, suggests luxury, if not individuality of taste.*

MRS. HOOKER, a big, aggressive woman of middle age, sits at a table, writing cards in mad haste, for a pile of boxes of various sizes in variegated Christmas wrappings. She has a mannerism of concluding her remarks with two little grunts, indicative of her good nature.

RITA, a pert house maid, comes in from the billiard room, carrying a large bundle of packages. She stumbles and lets them fall on the floor with a crash.

MRS. HOOKER. (*Helping RITA pick up the packages*) Rita, what an ayalanche!

RITA. Mrs. Hooker, cook says——

MRS. HOOKER. Can't you see I haven't time to hear what cook says?

RITA. But cook——

MRS. HOOKER. Rita, you are exasperating. Here it is only three days before Christmas and I am fairly suffocated with responsibilities, and you keep coming to me with stories about cook. Now I haven't time——

RITA. But cook, she——

MRS. HOOKER. Rita! Did I tell you that Miss Floy and Mr. Stephen will dine at home this evening?

RITA. No.

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, Rita, when will you learn to say "No ma'am"?

RITA. I haven't time. I haven't time. (*Exit RITA with a flounce, through door to billard room. Front door is heard to slam. Enter MR. HOOKER from hall. Short, with gray hair and moustache, slightly bald,—at first sight he would seem a conventional figure, but his gruff, mocking tone fails to conceal a naturally genial disposition*)

MRS. HOOKER. (*Busily writing and not looking up*) I thought you'd never come, Father. Don't you know we're dining out this evening at the Van Tyne-Allens?

MR. HOOKER. I've been rushed to death all day, Mother. Office never in such a turmoil—telephone every second—everybody in a hurry.

MRS. HOOKER. And I've been rushed all day, too—every day for that matter.

MR. HOOKER. Yes, Mother, but there is a difference between your philanthropy and my grain business. You may be sowing the seed, but I am reaping the whirlwind. (*He sighs, steals back of her chair, and kisses her on the forehead*)

MRS. HOOKER. (*Looking up for the first time*) Why, Jim, what's the matter?

MR. HOOKER. Matter?

MRS. HOOKER. You haven't kissed me before for years. Not that I mind, dear.

MR. HOOKER. (*Sitting dejectedly*) Suppose we haven't had time.

MRS. HOOKER. And we haven't a minute now. Hurry and dress. You know, I can always dress quicker than you can.

MR. HOOKER. Let's not go.

MRS. HOOKER. But it's a dinner—the dinner of the season. They'd never forgive us for regretting at the eleventh hour.

MR. HOOKER. Tell 'em I'm sick.

MRS. HOOKER. Jim, what is the matter? Your rheumatism? If you'd only keep busy, you'd forget it.

MR. HOOKER. No, 'tisn't rheumatism. Sally, I was thinkin' as I came in to-night—you so distracted with your Christmasing and our whole house stirred up like Bedlam all of the time——

MRS. HOOKER. What nonsense! There isn't a happier family in America than we are.

MR. HOOKER. That's just it. There aren't any happy families in Amercia. We're all too confoundedly busy to be happy.

MRS. HOOKER. Preposterous. The only way to be happy is to be busy. I've heard you say so a thousand times. Now this is no time for moralizing. Hurry up stairs, there's a dear.

MR. HOOKER. Hurry, hurry, hurry! That's it in nutshell. Everybody's hurrying and nobody knows why. I've been thinking I've made a mistake in piling up money for us to spend. We were happier when we started on forty dollars a month, Sally,—now weren't we?

MRS. HOOKER. What makes you so sentimental to-night, Jim? Is it the Christmas season? Really, there is something wrong with you. How could the four of us live on forty a month? Why, Floy spends as much for a pair of boots, and Steve for a supply of cigarettes. Really, dear, this is no time

to rhapsodize on the good old days when we were poor. They were good days, Jim, and I enjoyed cooking for you,—yes, and washing your clothes, too. And nobody could launder a collar better than I, if I do say it. But now we have something more important to do. We must get ready for that dinner, for one thing. I'll tell Seton to have the car at six forty-five. We'll have a few minutes on the way to decide what we are going to talk about. (*She goes toward the telephone, but is stopped by her husband*)

MR. HOOKER. Sally, it's no use. We can't go. (*He buries his face in his hands and she hurries to him*)

MRS. HOOKER. What is it, dear? I hope you aren't going to have a breakdown.

MR. HOOKER. Yes, that's what it is, a breakdown.

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, dear, everybody seems to be breaking down. Mrs. DeWitt Smith fell right over the bridge table the other day, just like that, flat, and they've carried her off to a sanitarium and she'll probably be there the rest of her life—but you are not like that, Jim.

MR. HOOKER. No, Sally, my breakdown is going to be different. I am broke.

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, everybody is, in the holiday season. But I have some cash. (*Looking in her check book*) Let me see, how much do you want?

MR. HOOKER. You don't understand, Sally. Oh, I can't tell you. (*He restrains a sob*)

MRS. HOOKER. You don't mean—the firm is going to fail?

MR. HOOKER. Yes, to-morrow. It's been coming for a long time. We can't stave it off any longer. Directors' meeting this afternoon. We're busted.

MRS. HOOKER. But surely we have some private income? (*He shakes his head in dissent*)

MRS. HOOKER. This home is ours, the law gives us that.

MR. HOOKER. I can't live in a mansion, Sally, on other people's money. No, the home—everything has to go.

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, it's too terrible. Right at the time when the children need it. I don't care about myself, Father, I can get along. Life for me has been one perpetual readjustment, any way. But the children—Oh, Daddy—(*The telephone bell rings, violently*) No, I am not going to cry. Oh, I do hope there are no telephones in heaven. (*Answering the telephone*) Hello, yes, this is she. Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Force? So glad to hear from you. Yes, I remember you very well. Oh, I see. I'll take the matter up with Mr. Hooker. Yes, doubtless he will send you a check. Yes, worthy cause. Yes, thank you. Good-bye. (*Hanging up receiver*) One comfort, we shan't be troubled with this incessant begging much longer. We'll be the beggars now, I suppose— Why, Jim, now I know. I have been trying to think of it all the time I was telephoning. There is Aunt Sophia's legacy, and that is something like a million, isn't it?

MR. HOOKER. Yes, but we can't depend on that. It all goes to Floy, you know.

MRS. HOOKER. Well, Floy will see that we don't starve, bless her. Now, Father, let's have a good time at the dinner party.

MR. HOOKER. You are a good sport, Mother. But don't imagine that legacy is going to prevent the crash, a crash that will make a noise all over the United States. Guess I'll make a fine head-liner for the morning papers,—self-made, unmade. Probably call me a crook, too.

(*The telephone bell rings.*)

MRS. HOOKER. Again! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! (*Answering the telephone*) Hello. Oh, is that you, dear? Yes, we were about to start to the dinner, but we can't go. Will you explain? An awful thing has happened. Mr. Hooker—Oh, I can't tell you.

MR. HOOKER. Go on. Don't mind me. Tell her the whole truth.

MRS. HOOKER. Mr. Hooker has had a—a stroke. Oh, no, he is alive, yes, quite alive. Yes, thank you, thank you, thank you. Good-bye. (*Hanging up the receiver*) Jim, where is Aunt Sophia's will?

MR. HOOKER. Oh, it doesn't come into effect for a year or two. Queer thing, that will. I never told you the details of it, did I? Not sure we'll ever get the money.

MRS. HOOKER. What do you mean?

MR. HOOKER. (*Opening a secret panel and disclosing a safe*) Coast clear?

MRS. HOOKER. (*Glancing through the doorways*) Yes.

MR. HOOKER. (*Opening safe and fumbling through some papers*) Here it is. Never told a soul about it, not even you. Suppose you ought to know, though.

MRS. HOOKER. Jim, please!

MR. HOOKER. Well, you know how queer Sophia always was. Well, her will is queerer. Not so strange, though, either, when you remember her life—always pining because she didn't marry that chap she was engaged to. Guess she didn't get much pleasure out of being an old maid.

MRS. HOOKER. Come to the point, Jim, before I expire.

MR. HOOKER. This is the point. She left her million to our Floy, providing Floy is engaged to be married before she is twenty-one and marries the same man before she is twenty-two.

MRS. HOOKER. Outrageous! Floy engaged before she is twenty-one! Don't you realize she is twenty-one to-morrow?

MR. HOOKER. No, thought she'd be twenty. Lemme see, when was she born?

MRS. HOOKER. Twenty-one to-morrow.

MR. HOOKER. That's a fact! (*Examining the will*, MRS. HOOKER *looking over his shoulder*) Yes, that's the stipulation: engaged before she is twenty-one and married before she is twenty-two. (*Reading*) "In the event of her failure to comply with either or both of these stipulations, the entire property, without reservation, is bequeathed for the establishment of the Sophia Skinner Home for Spinsters,—the regulations governing such disposal herewith attached."

MRS. HOOKER. I always thought Sophia was crazy,—half crazy.

MR. HOOKER. Well, she was only my half sister.

MRS. HOOKER. Crazy or not, I don't suppose you want to break her will?

MR. HOOKER. No. No, I wouldn't do that.

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, why didn't you tell me about this sooner?

MR. HOOKER. I thought there was a year yet—and Floy has so many men—and, confound it, Sally, you don't think I'd sell her, do you? Not for a billion.

MRS. HOOKER. That is fine talk, Father, but Floy may soon be behind a counter and a well qualified candidate for that home for spinsters, if we don't do something.

MR. HOOKER. What could we do?

MRS. HOOKER. Do you realize that while we sit here the minutes are ticking away, and Floy must be engaged before midnight?

MR. HOOKER. I'll never coerce her, not a bit of it.

MRS. HOOKER. Nor I. But we needn't be like

most parents and go to the other extreme. After all, as they know in Europe, marriage is a family affair. Now Floy has had half a dozen proposals——

MR. HOOKER. But she has turned them all down, and right she is. They're none of 'em good enough for her. Confound it, Sally, she's got to marry for love—million or no million.

(Front door bangs.)

MRS. HOOKER. Hush, there she is.

(Enter from the hall FLOY, a lovely, fluffy, pirouetting young thing, atingle with the adventure of life. Her muff and arms are full of Christmas packages.)

FLOY. *(Running to MR. HOOKER with a kiss and perching on the arm of his chair)* Hello, Dad. Forgive me my Christmases? *(MRS. HOOKER goes to the telephone, and talks in a low tone)* I've overdrawn my bank account again, but you don't mind, you're such a generous old dadkins. Why so grave? Do you mind?

MR. HOOKER. No, Florodora.

FLOY. If you do, we'll economize. We'll cancel that ermine cloak you were going to give me for my birthday. Awful having birthdays and Christmases all at once. Really, Dad, I've cut down my Christmas list and cut it and cut it until I feel like a regular spug, but there are still one hundred and ten of my most intimate friends that I have to remember. And I have to get them nice presents, too. They'd think me stingy if I didn't.

MRS. HOOKER. *(Speaking loudly at the telephone)* Can't you hear? Please tell Mrs. Jenkinson that Miss Hooker and Mr. Stephen Hooker can

not attend the opera with her this evening. I will explain later.

FLOY. Why, Mother, we are going to the opera.

MRS. HOOKER. Not to-night, dear.

FLOY. But I particularly want to hear this opera—it's so modern and naughty.

MRS. HOOKER. Your father wants you.

FLOY. I never heard of such a thing. I haven't been home a night since my coming out in the fall. I'd hate to spoil my record now. What's the matter with Dad?

MR. HOOKER. Nothing, nothing. Go ahead, Floy, and enjoy yourself.

MRS. HOOKER. Dad wants us all to break our engagements for to-night.

FLOY. And the four of us to be here together? Oh, that is a nice homey idea—and such a novelty.

MRS. HOOKER. Yes, and I thought of asking one or two men in, just for an informal good time.

FLOY. Men! No, anything but men! I'm sick of them. No, my head isn't turned the least tiny bit. I am disillusioned about men. They all get in line and propose year after year to one debutante after another. No, if we're going to have anybody, I'll ask Letitia Brown. The poor girl is never asked anywhere, and she's a dear. (FLOY goes to the telephone, and calls up LETITIA in a low tone)

MR. HOOKER. (To MRS. HOOKER) Not a word about the failure. Let her enjoy herself to-night.

MRS. HOOKER. But she can't be betrothed to Letitia!

FLOY. (At telephone) I'm so glad you can come, Letitia. I'll send the car for you right away. No trouble. Good-bye, dear.

MRS. HOOKER. Let's ask Mr. Pollard.

FLOY. Please, no, Mother, he has proposed to me at the last two dinner parties, and he is older and

balder than Dad, and so stupid. But I love your bald spot, Daddie.

MRS. HOOKER. Then there is Reginald Montgomery.

FLOY. Heaven preserve us from Reggie. He has been shopping with me all day, carrying my bundles. He's a faithful Fido, but I've had enough of him.

MRS. HOOKER. How would you like to have him carry your bundles all your life?

FLOY. Mother, what is up? All of a sudden, you are an incorrigible match-maker.

MRS. HOOKER. Well, faithfulness is a rare trait in man. Reggie has it. So had your father.

FLOY. Don't, don't put Father in a class with Reggie.

MR. HOOKER. Thank you, my dear.

MRS. HOOKER. Then if we're not to ask Reggie, what men shall we have?

FLOY. Why have any men? I'd like a rest from the male species.

MRS. HOOKER. I know. I am going to ask Clinton Morgan. He's a good boy. He has absolutely no vices.

FLOY. Did you ever think how absolutely damning it is to describe a man negatively as having no vices?

MRS. HOOKER. Your father never had any vices.

FLOY. Oh, Mother, Dad is a positive devil. That's why I adore him.

MRS. HOOKER. Will you please select a—another devil for this evening?

FLOY. Mother, when I find a real man, I'll nab him. You leave that to me.

MR. HOOKER. By the way, I got a telephone call from an old friend of yours, Floy. Almost forgot. The young man we saw so much of the winter we were on the ranch in Texas.

MRS. HOOKER. Last winter. You don't mean

John Crandall? (MR. HOOKER *nods assent*) A splendid fellow, don't you think so, Floy?

FLOY. I'd rather not express my opinion of Jack Crandall.

MRS. HOOKER. Why not?

FLOY. I think he is positively hateful.

MR. HOOKER. That's funny. He said he'd like to call while he was in town, providing you wanted to see him, Floy. He sort of underscored the *providing*.

FLOY. Well, I don't. So there. He is an egotistical, domineering, opinionated—ugh! (*She stamps with rage and rushes up stairs*)

MRS. HOOKER. He is the man.

MR. HOOKER. I don't follow you, Mother.

MRS. HOOKER. "Egotistical, domineering, opinionated"—that is why I selected you, Jim, and now see how I have improved you.

MR. HOOKER. Mother, is this a time for joking?

MRS. HOOKER. Quick. Where is he stopping? The Carleton? (MR. HOOKER *nods weakly*. MRS. HOOKER *at the telephone*) Main 26 A. May I speak to Mr. Crandall—Mr. John Crandall? Hello, hello, hello. Oh, is that you, Jack? I can see your tan right through the telephone. You say you're not accustomed to telephones? When you get used to them, you can see right through a conversation. No, this is her mother. Yes, Mrs. Hooker. That is a compliment. Floy is crazy to see you. Yes, indeed. So are we all. Come right up. Come up to dinner, can't you? Good, we dine at seven. Good-bye. (*She hangs up the receiver*) Now for the cook. If the dinner is only a good one, I think we may consider the million remaining in the family.

MR. HOOKER. Sally, you ought to have been the financier of this family.

MRS. HOOKER. Don't think me heartless, Jim. I wouldn't have her tied to anybody but her heart's

choice, but now that I've found out who that choice is, she shall have him.

MR. HOOKER. You couldn't have picked a finer man. But I don't think, with all your Napoleonic strategy, you can bring things to a head to-night.

MRS. HOOKER. Any woman can be a Napoleon so far as strategy is concerned. We must turn defeat into victory to-night. We have been going the pace that kills. I see it now—you with your business and I with my million interests, but we have a gambler's chance to-night.

(Enter STEVE HOOKER in riding costume. He is a jolly, agile youth, with the face of Michael Angelo's David and the spirit of Shakespeare's Puck.)

STEVE. Hello, folks. Had a bully ride on the boulevard. Just time for a shower before dinner. Gee, I miss the swimming pool at the dormitory. Glad to be home, just the same. *(Half way up stairs, he leans over the banister and shouts)* Say, Mater, met a college pal of mine and asked him to dinner. Thought you wouldn't mind.

MRS. HOOKER. Not at all, Steve. The more the merrier. *(Exit MRS. HOOKER. STEVE returns)*

STEVE. He lives here, but not exactly in our set. But he's a prince. He's in my class—only a freshman, but there isn't a more popular man in college. Plays left guard on the first team. You mustn't show your ignorance about him, Dad, because everybody know he's made the all-American team. You may not like his looks. He's a sort of a diamond in the rough. I gave him an old Tuxedo of mine to wear. He hasn't any money. He couldn't have gone to college, he told me, if the authorities hadn't paid his way. But he had his pick of colleges, I can

tell you, and he took ours. Won't it be great for the old alma mater?

MR. HOOKER. Steve, I can hardly keep my mind on this paragon of yours. Do I understand your college paid him for coming? That certainly hasn't been my experience with you.

STEVE. But I'm not an athlete. You don't understand these things, Dad. But if you'd been to college, you would. Hello, what's this? (*He picks up the will which is lying open on the table*)

MR. HOOKER. That is your Aunt Sophia's will. Give it to me.

STEVE. (*Looking it over*) Will, eh? Floy gets her money, doesn't she? Aunt Sophia never did like me, nor any man, I guess. Great lot of red tape, this.

MR. HOOKER. Who gave you permission to read that? Hand it to me.

STEVE. Now, Dad, why don't you let me know anything about business? Jumping Jupiter, what's this? I can't make this out. Engaged? Floy doesn't qualify unless she is——

MR. HOOKER. Unless she is engaged before midnight to-night.

STEVE. What a lark!

MR. HOOKER. Not exactly my idea of fun.

STEVE. But it's such a big gamble. Does Floy know?

MR. HOOKER. No, and don't you tell her. But since you are so anxious to know about business, I may as well inform you: your dad's a failure. Our firm is about to make an assignment.

STEVE. No, you don't say so? Well—what can I do to help you, Dad?

MR. HOOKER. There's only one possibility, and that's Floy's engagement before midnight. I wouldn't do anything to urge the little girl, but if

it should happen, it would be the best thing for her—and for all of us.

STEVE. Poor old Floy. I tell you what. I'll see that she is engaged. You leave that to me.

MR. HOOKER. Would you mind revealing the name of her future husband?

STEVE. Ted Stone, the foot ball hero, now on his way here to dinner.

MR. HOOKER. Why, she has never seen him, has she?

STEVE. That doesn't matter. To see him is to love him. All the girls in the stadium go wild about him.

MR. HOOKER. Preposterous idea, boy.

STEVE. You don't know how these things go nowadays. Love-at-first-sight,—that's the rule. Why, I'd had the experience several times already—once in Paris, twice in Vienna, and——

MR. HOOKER. You have had too damn many experiences.

STEVE. Well, Dad, the real bang-up love matches come with a zip-pop. We haven't time for the old-fashioned long protracted courting.

MR. HOOKER. And one in every five of your rapid fire matches ends in the divorce court.

FLOY. (*From up stairs*) Dad, aren't you going to dress for dinner? (*FLOY runs down stairs, hooking her gown as she goes*)

STEVE. My, Sis, but you are a dream. I know somebody's heart that's going to be awfully wrenched, to-night.

FLOY. Then it will be Letitia Brown's, for she is our only guest.

STEVE. Is that prune coming? Help!

FLOY. Wish you had half as many brains as Letitia has.

STEVE. But there is somebody else coming—a foot ball hero—the foot ball hero, Ted Stone.

FLOY. Ted Stone? I've heard his name. Seen his picture in football togs. Big fellow, isn't he?

STEVE. Big, that's what he is. And a lady killer. You had better be on guard, Sis.

FLOY. Silly. (*To MR. HOOKER*) Please, Daddy, dress for dinner. I want Letitia to think we always do it. Your things are all laid out.

MR. HOOKER. (*Going gloomily up stairs*) And I will be laid out soon, I guess. If you two harum scarums hear a pistol shot when I reach my room—

FLOY. Then we'll know you're on the marks, Dad, and you've only a minute to dress in. Hurry, hurry.

MR. HOOKER. Do we ever have more than a minute for anything? You may decide to get married, Floy, all in a minute. Who knows? Who knows? (*Exit MR. HOOKER up stairs*)

(*FLOY bites her lip in vexation.*)

STEVE. I'm with you, Dad. (*STEVE disappears up stairs, running after his father*)

(*Enter MRS. HOOKER.*)

MRS. HOOKER. A terrible thing has happened.

FLOY. Mother, what?

MRS. HOOKER. (*With tragic emphasis*) The cook has gone.

FLOY. Gone? What for?

MRS. HOOKER. For good—at least for the Christmas holidays.

FLOY. Can't the other maids cook?

MRS. HOOKER. Not a bit.

FLOY. How terrible.

MRS. HOOKER. Terrible.

FLOY. I can make a lovely omelette.

MRS. HOOKER. No one could desire more for a

dinner party. No, child, I won't have you in the kitchen. I'll go out to get the meal. Don't tell anybody. It would be a scandal if it were known that I can cook. You tell them I have a headache, and you act as hostess.

FLOY. No, Mother, I know a better trick. Let us call it a winter picnic and eat on the floor in front of the fire. Now that's a dear. You run and dress, and I'll arrange the menu. I really can do something if you only give me a chance. Run and dress, that's a dear.

MRS. HOOKER. All right. You always do have your own way.

FLOY. (*Writing the menu*) Let me see, what shall we have? I know: baked beans—and brown bread—and potato salad at the Delicatessen,—and—

MRS. HOOKER. (*Starting to leave, but returning*) Floy, I have a presentiment. I—er—I had a dream last night.

FLOY. And you'll have dreams to-night, if you eat all the things I am going to have at our picnic. Why, Mother dear, aren't you well? What makes you look so queer?

MRS. HOOKER. I have a presentiment——

FLOY. (*Writing*) Wienies, dill pickles, lemonade, ice cream, angel food. What's that you are saying, Mother?

MRS. HOOKER. I have a presentiment that you are going to meet your fate to-night—your—your future husband.

FLOY. Again! Father and Steve and now you. Is this a conspiracy? (*Exit MRS. HOOKER, with a gesture of abandon. FLOY continuing to write and not observing her departure*) Why have you decided, all of you, that I am going to plight my troth this night of all nights? Do you hear? I won't promise to marry anybody to-night—not if I never get married—never, never, never!

(While FLOY is making this declaration, RITA has ushered in JACK CRANDALL. RITA retires. JACK, back of FLOY, is much amused by her tirade. He is a big, clean cut, handsome youth, deeply tanned, wearing evening clothes with a certain natural grace, and yet moving slowly and a bit awkwardly amid luxurious surroundings. He is whimsically unconventional and speaks with a pleasing drawl.)

JACK. Almost sounds like the last words you spoke to me, out on the plains of Texas last winter. Your voice has a mighty powerful carrying quality, little girl.

FLOY. (*Who has slowly turned around*) * Jack, it is you! I—I didn't think you'd ever come—you were so proud and—(*He opens his arms and she rushes toward them*)

JACK. When you asked me, honey, how could I help it?

FLOY. (*Pausing haughtily*) When I asked you!

JACK. Well your mother over the telephone said that you all wanted me.

FLOY. Oh, Mother has been calling you up.

JACK. I reckon that's what you call it.

FLOY. As soon as you arrived in town, I suppose?

JACK. Why not, honey?

FLOY. That explains it. And did you,~ Mr. Crandall, think I had anything to do with this—this trap?

JACK. Why, I was lead to surmise, Miss Floy, that you all wanted to see me, but if you don't, well, I reckon I'd better be movin' on. (*He moves toward the door, but is intercepted by STEVE, who rushes down the stairs into his arms*)

STEVE. Well, well, Jack, you old bronco buster, welcome to our city.

JACK. You had better put a halter on me, Steve, or I'll get lost in your city. Never was in a big city before—that is, since I could remember. Everybody seems in an awful hurry—wonder what they do with all the time they save? Just saw two automobiles bump out here on the corner. No especial damage done, but even they didn't save their time.

FLOY. (*Looking through the window*) They're bringing somebody in here. Oh! Oh! It's Letitia. (*STEVE rushes to open the front door, and ushers in TED STONE, carrying LETITIA. TED is fat, awkward, bashful, taciturn. LETITIA is a languishing aesthetic creature, gushing in garments as in speech. TED deposits her on the divan, and she sits bolt upright. Enter MR. HOOKER, from the stairs, and MRS. HOOKER and RITA, both carrying thermos bottles and hampers of picnic provisions. Every one asks questions at once. General confusion*) Letitia, are you hurt?

LETITIA. Not a bit, my dear, but I am afraid your car is. While it was skidding, all I did was to sit still and squeal. I ought to have lived in the eighteenth century, Floy, when heroines were always squealing and fainting. Awfully bad form to faint nowadays. But I did—almost, and this man with his strong arms—Oh, I am so grateful.

STEVE. Why if it isn't Ted Stone, good old scout, always in the center rush. Floy, Pater, Mater, this is Ted Stone.

LETITIA. Oh, to think I was saved by the great football hero!

TED. There wasn't anything to save. I mean—

STEVE. Pretty close to a touch down, eh? (*STEVE removes TED's ulster, and reveals the latter's pudgy figure almost bursting out of a suit several sizes too small for him*)

TED. (*Seizing RITA's hand and shaking it*) Pleased to meet you, pleased to meet you. Steve

has told me a lot about his—his peach of a sister. (*Exit RITA. TED to STEVE*) What's the matter? When it comes to butting into society, kid, I don't score. How does your suit look on me? Pretty swell fit, eh?

STEVE. Ted, it is a swell fit. This is my friend Mr. Stone, Mr. Crandall.

(*They shake hands.*)

JACK. Sorry that I am leaving, sir, just as you arrive.

MR. HOOKER. Why, you are not leaving now, my boy. We haven't seen you yet.

MRS. HOOKER. Jack, sit right down here. We're going to have a picnic lunch around the fire, a winter picnic, Floy calls it, all in your honor.

LETITA. (*Springing forth and clasping JACK's hand*) Jack! I knew it was Jack Crandall. Jack Crandall, I have dreamed of you.

JACK. Sorry, Miss—er—

LETITIA. Brown.

JACK. Sorry I can't return the compliment.

LETITIA. Of course you can't, as you never saw me before, but I've seen your picture recently, in one of the recent magazines.

JACK. What magazine? It was without my permission.

MRS. HOOKER. Are we entertaining a celebrity, unawares? (*MRS. HOOKER and RITA are spreading the cloth in front of the fire, and placing the viands thereon*)

LETITIA. Why, don't you know what a lion you have lured? Don't you know, Floy?

FLOY. We met Mr. Crandall very casually on our trip south last winter and Mother asked him here this evening. I did not know he was in the city until he arrived. We know nothing else about him.

But I always thought there was some mystery about you, Mr. Crandall. You seem like an escaped convict, or something.

LETITIA. Worse than that—a literary man.

JACK. Please don't tell on me.

LETITIA. Oh, but I must. He writes stories, the loveliest and thrillingest stories about truth and purity and beauty—not a bit modern, you know, but I adore it. Do sit down here, Mr. Crandall, and you on the other side, Mr. Stone. Just think of having two lions to roar at one picnic.

(All seat themselves except FLOY. RITA passes the coffee, which MRS. HOOKER pours from thermos bottles. TED and STEVE eat ravenously.)

STEVE. What a lark! I'll run you a race on the sandwiches, Ted.

TED. Ugh, huh. *(TED devours the food—a scream)*

MR. HOOKER. No, you don't, Steve. Take time to chew your food. People don't take time to eat nowadays.

JACK. Nor to sleep, nor to walk, nor to talk.

LETITIA. Isn't it sad we have lost the eighteenth century art of conversation?

JACK. And of letter writing.

FLOY. Telegrams are more to the point.

LETITIA. I have just been reading a volume of correspondence by William Cowper. In one of his letters—don't you adore them?—he says something like this—it's so, so Cowperesque I can't help quoting it: "I have just time to observe that time is short," he says, the poor dear, living back in the nice quiet old eighteenth century—what would he say about the twentieth century?—"I have just time to observe that time is short, and by the time I have made the observation, time is gone."

MRS. HOOKER. But, Letitia, tell us more about Mr. Crandall.

LETITIA. I know all about you, Mr. Crandall.

JACK. That is more than I do.

LETITIA. I read it in the magazine article. So it must be so.

MRS. HOOKER. Do tell us.

JACK. Don't.

LETITIA. "When Mr. Jack Crandall, the celebrated young writer of idealistic fiction, whose novels are beginning to sell in spite of their idealism"——

STEVE. Gee, never dreamed you were a highbrow, Jack, when you and I were swapping yarns out on the plains.

JACK. How do you define a highbrow, Steve?

STEVE. A highbrow is somebody who writes something nobody wants to read.

LETITIA. By the way, Mr. Crandall, what is your opinion of Brieux?

TED. (*In a hoarse whisper, to STEVE*) Is it a cheese?

LETITIA. And of Schnitzler? And of——

JACK. I prefer Mark Twain and O. Henry.

STEVE. Hooray for America.

LETITIA. But you must know Mr. Crandall's history. When he was a very little boy in New York City, and his father was a missionary in Smyrna or somewhere, his mother died, and so, as the boy's health was then delicate, he was put on a ranch in Texas with a lot of books and kind people——

JACK. - Where he has been until this minute, getting outside of a big bunch of health, and, thank heavens, far from the madding crowd.

LETITIA. Yes, they say that is why your themes are so naïve, because you know nothing about civilization. Is that so?

JACK. Well, until this trip I was tolerably

ignorant of sky scrapers, and telephones, and automobiles, and all-night theaters, and smart sets, and frenzied finance and all the rest of the rush you all call civilization. Naturally, I had read something about it, but there is a difference between reading of the European War and having your brains crazed by the breaking of shells over your head.

FLOY. Really, you preach as well as Father does—and most of the older generation—and along the same line. Personally I believe in this age. It is the age of progress. And I believe in America. It is the place where things are doing. Perhaps it won't do for romancers or sermonizers.

LETITIA. But tell me, Mr. Crandall, since you are such a hermit, such a recluse, such a—what shall I call it?—lover of the simple life, why did you abandon your sylvan solitude—

STEVE. Not very sylvan.

LETITIA. And plunge into this seething crater of action?

JACK. I don't mind telling you, ma'am: I'm seeking a mate.

LETITIA. (*Fluttering*) Really, Mr. Crandall, you are charmingly unconventional. You mean, you are looking for a wife?

JACK. *The* wife.

FLOY. Have you tried advertising? Perhaps you aren't aware that it pays to advertise—another hurry-up method.

JACK. I reckon I will take a short cut method in lassoing my mate. I'll be leading her to the altar in a mighty few days.

STEVE. That's the talk.

TED. Isn't it getting warm here?

LETITIA. Then you have no faith in the old-fashioned, long protracted *affaire de coeur*?

JACK. Not for me, ma'am. I reckon I'll be leaving this turmoil of a town to-morrow, and I

shouldn't be surprised if I took my mate with me.

FLOY. Really, I presume you'll club her over the head and prove yourself the superman. You'll excuse me, please. (*RITA summons her to the telephone*) I should love to hear more of your plans, the egoist is always so refreshing.

TED. I guess we're going to have another snow flurry.

FLOY. (*At the telephone*) Yes, Alice. Oh, is it to-morrow you start? Oh, I've always longed to take the Panama trip. You're a dear to ask me. Yes, I'll do it. You and Ned will be the jolliest chaperones. Has he the reservations? Yes, you can depend on me. To-morrow at seven, at the Union Station. Good-bye.

MRS. HOOKER. Well, I must say, Floy, you might have consulted your parents before embarking on the Panama trip.

FLOY. I suppose I ought, but by the time we could have called a family council, it would have been too late to decide. Besides, it would have been settled this way any way. You always let me have my own way, you dears. Afraid I'll have to say good-night. Sorry, Letitia, to run away, but I don't believe you'll miss me, you have such congenial company. And I must direct Lucille with the packing. Good-night. (*Exit FLOY into the hall*)

MRS. HOOKER. Floy, dear.

FLOY. (*Re-entering*) Yes, Mother.

MRS. HOOKER. Now, Floy, won't you please give up this crazy notion and have a pleasant evening with us?

FLOY. Sorry, Mother, but you know how upsetting it is to change one's plans more than once.

STEVE. Oh, Floy, be a sport. Here is Ted Stone come especially to see you.

FLOY. And I will go especially to see him play foot ball next fall.

JACK. (*Rising and detaining FLOY*) Miss Floy, I don't know much about etiquette, and I don't very much care about it. I am not going to implore you, as the others have. I command you to come back and join this party given in your honor. It is the only appropriate thing for you to do, and if you don't, you'll regret it. I reckon you'll regret it.

FLOY. Mr. Crandall, I shall get one of your books to read on my trip. I am sure I shall enjoy it.

JACK. I reckon you won't like my book any better than you do me.

FLOY. Oh, yes, I shall, because you have already proved yourself a master of fiction. (*With a toss of her head, FLOY disappears up stairs. JACK, who has been leaning against the table while talking to FLOY, starts back, thereby upsetting the pile of Christmas packages which fall on the head of TED STONE. All hurry to his assistance. General confusion*)

Curtain

ACT II

SCENE: *Same as preceding ACT. No time is supposed to elapse between acts. All the characters, sitting about as at the end of ACT I, look bored. A pause.*

STEVE. (*Funereal tone*) The guests will kindly remain seated until the family have passed out. Not since Aunt Sophia's funeral have we had such a cheerful gathering.

(*RITA removes the dishes, assisted by TED.*)

MRS. HOOKER. Stephen, won't you ever learn there's a time to weep and a time to laugh?

STEVE. A time to mourn and a time to dance. Let's have a dance.

LETITIA. Oh, let's.

TED. Where are the girls?

LETITIA. I'm one.

MRS. HOOKER. And I another.

STEVE. You're a good sport, Mater. Here, you fellows. Help me take up the rugs in the billiard room and we'll start the phonograph. (*Exeunt STEVE, TED, JACK and LETITIA into the billiard room*)

MR. HOOKER. Can't we get rid of this rabble? I feel as though I were attending my own funeral. This is a fine preparation for to-morrow's ordeal.

MRS. HOOKER. Nonsense. Young people take our minds off our troubles. Jim, you and I are just as young as the rest of them. Nobody ever gets old nowadays, and we're not going to give up now, Dad. If Floy should become engaged to-night, you could prevent the crash, couldn't you? I mean, with the will as evidence——

MR. HOOKER. It's possible, Mother, possible, if—but what is the use of talking about such *if's*? Floy has decided to stay in her room to-night, and what she decides, she does.

MRS. HOOKER. So does her mother. If nothing else will work, I'll tell her everything.

MR. HOOKER. No, you mustn't do that. Promise you won't. Can't you see it would be selling her?

MRS. HOOKER. Well, I won't tell her, but we'll manage it. I am not going to give up hope until the clock strikes twelve.

MR. HOOKER. Mother, that has been the whole trouble with us—it has been a race against time from the start, Floy with her society, Steve with his

sports, you with your philanthropy and heaven knows what, and me with my business,—we've all been going the pace that kills.

MRS. HOOKER. And when we are killed, Dad, they will race us to our graves in aeroplane hearses.

MR. HOOKER. No, Sally, we'll escape. Only the wealthy can afford to fly to eternal peace.

(Re-enter LETITIA and JACK, she chatting briskly to him. Lively dance music is heard.)

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, they've started the phonograph. I simply can't make my feet behave when I hear that, can you?

LETITIA. *(To JACK)* You will dance with me, won't you?

JACK. I don't know any of these new steps you all are dancing.

LETITIA. I'll dance anything you do. Oh, think of having a great author for a partner!

JACK. But I can't go so fast.

LETITIA. I'll show you. *(She whisks him off into the billiard room)*

MRS. HOOKER. Come, Father, let's have a turn.

MR. HOOKER. Well, Mother, if you insist.

(They also whisk off into the billiard room. Enter STEVE and TED.)

STEVE. The chance I've been looking for. Got something important to tell you Ted.

TED. Tell away.

STEVE. We are good pals, aren't we, old scout?

TED. I'm broke. What can I do for you?

STEVE. There is something you can do—now don't get excited when I tell you. You can propose to my sister to-night.

TED. Propose? What?

STEVE. Marriage, of course.

TED. To-night?

STEVE. To-night, before midnight, too.

TED. Your sister?

STEVE. Say, just let me sprinkle in a few dittos. Yes, my sister. Any objection?

TED. Is this a bet?

STEVE. No. On the square.

TED. Did you mean for me to marry her, too?

STEVE. Sure thing.

TED. She wouldn't have me.

STEVE. She is dippy about you.

TED. She is? Well, I—I'd like to do what I can for you, Steve, but—well, I never proposed to a girl in my life.

STEVE. You'll never have a better chance.

TED. Chance? Why, she isn't here. She has gone.

STEVE. Oh, the Mater'll get her back all right. Trust her.

TED. Your mother wants me to—to do this, too? (STEVE *nods assent*) What kind of a game is this? What's the matter with your sister?

STEVE. You'll kindly leave Floy's name out of this discussion.

TED. Oh! I'm to marry her, but I'm not to mention her. Unmentionable——

STEVE. I can't explain it all to you now, but I will later. It involves—I thought you were the one man I could ask such a favor of, and now you are showing the white feather.

TED. But don't you see, kid, this is out of my line? Worse than math. (*Mopping his brow*) It makes me scared to think of it.

STEVE. Brace up, old man. Every man has to come to it sooner or later. It might as well be now.

TED. No, you'd better not count on me. Say, honest, aren't you kidding me?

STEVE. Give me your hand. There's our fraternity grip. Now do you believe me?

TED. Yes, I believe you.

STEVE. It is unusual, I know, but——

(MR. and MRS. HOOKER come in from the billiard room, dancing frantically. He sinks in a chair, exhausted.)

MR. HOOKER. Help, Sally, have mercy on an old man.

MRS. HOOKER. Why, father, can't you get your second wind? Ah, Mr. Stone, you're just the one. Let's have a good trot. Mr. Hooker is so easily discouraged.

TED. Thank you—er—but I don't know how. (He is seized by MRS. HOOKER, and off they cavort)

MR. HOOKER. Steve, I am played out.

STEVE. Buck up, Dad. It's not so bad.

MR. HOOKER. No use. Get me a whiskey and soda, that's a good fellow.

STEVE. Here you are, Dad, but go slow on the dope.

MR. HOOKER. Can't go slow on anything. I've seen this coming for weeks, Steve. I've scarcely slept day or night. I've been watching for an opportunity to stick the other fellow, fighting for a chance to rise to the surface, but all the while I've felt myself being tugged down, down into the whirlpool. We do a lot of talk about cooperation, but the business war is on a bigger scale, that's all. Precious little of the golden rule about it. Why, I could fix up my credit now, if they'd only give me a day or two. It's a great game, my boy, if you've got a fighting chance, but it's hell when you're sinking to the bottom—that's what it is, hell.

STEVE. Don't worry, Dad. Floy and I are going to fix you up all right.

MR. HOOKER. Keep the little girl out of it. Poor thing, she'll suffer soon enough. Guess we've brought you youngsters up the wrong way.

STEVE. Whatever happens, Dad, you can't take away my year at college. Think of the prestige that will give me. Why, if you hadn't sent me east to college, I never would have known Ted Stone!

MR. HOOKER. I can imagine worse calamities.

STEVE. Wouldn't you be surprised, if Ted pulled us out of the hole?

MR. HOOKER. What are you driving at, Steve?

(Enter RITA from the hall, ushering in ALOSIOUS BARTHOLOMEW, a dapper bachelor, an up-to-date college professor, who speaks with staccato precision and rapidity, and uses jerky gestures as though he were delivering a popular lecture.)

ALOSIOUS. *(Giving his card to RITA who goes up stairs)* For the ladies. Good evening, gentlemen. Is this Mr. Hooker? I am Alosius Bartholomew, sometimes known as Dr. Bartholomew.

MR. HOOKER. This is my son, Dr. Bartholomew. You are a physician?

ALOSIOUS. Merely a physician to sick minds. I am a college professor, I must confess. I really prefer not to be called "Doctor." It is a Ph. D., you know, which I picked up in Germany before the war.

MR. HOOKER. Oh! What is your specialty?

STEVE. Your department, sir?

ALOSIOUS. Social science, the great department, the growing department. You, sir, as a man of business, must endorse the various phases of our work,—sociology, economics, money, banking. We even have courses in business. We are nothing if not practical, sir. Efficiency, efficiency, efficiency,—that is the watchword of modern education. All

the students elect courses in our department. I——

STEVE. Which is your college, sir?

ALOSIUS. You don't know?

STEVE. I am just home for my vacation. I go east to college.

ALOSIUS. There is nothing like the east. I am an easterner myself. But I have to teach here, here in the big university. I——

(Re-enter RITA.)

RITA. Miss Floy will be down directly, sir.

MR. HOOKER. Are you sure she is coming?

RITA. Yes,—sir. *(Exit RITA)*

ALOSIUS. What was I saying? Oh, yes, our university is a tremendous plant. Several new buildings are going up every year. It is not men but buildings—that is what makes the enrollment grow. We are close to the top in attendance, one of the largest institutions in the country, sir.

MR. HOOKER. It must be very satisfactory to come in intimate contact with so many young minds.

ALOSIUS. Intimate contact? I don't know one student from another in my classes. All my work is lecture work, and my assistant reads the papers. No, sir, teaching is a mere incident in the day's drudgery.

MR. HOOKER. Afraid I haven't kept up with modern educational methods.

ALOSIUS. Apparently not, sir. But you are a business man and you know the advantage of organization.

MR. HOOKER. And the disadvantage.

ALOSIUS. Precisely. And the disadvantage. Our whole problem is one of organization, reorganization, systematization. We are growing, we need constant readjustment. We have committee meetings before breakfast, at midnight, any time, all the time.

Whatever else you may say about our standards, we are not quiescent.

MR. HOOKER. You must be glad of this holiday vacation.

ALOSIUS. Vacation? Ha, that is the business man all over again. Vacation? Why, sir, I am busier during vacation than any other time.

MR. HOOKER. I don't understand.

STEVE. Why, reading and preparing his lectures, Dad.

ALOSIUS. Sorry to explode that illusion, my son. I never have time to read, and my lectures were prepared years ago. No, aside from attending various national conventions—similar to those of the labor unions—my time is taken up with the writing of books.

(LETITIA dashes in from the billiard room.)

LETITIA. Oh, Professor Bartholomew, did I hear you say you are writing a book?

ALOSIUS. Delighted to see you, Miss—er——

LETITIA. Brown.

ALOSIUS. Brown. Yes, I know your face perfectly—Brown. But I see so many faces. I——

LETITIA. Yes, that is the way with all of us, don't you feel? We are adrift amid a sea of faces. You remember what Bacon says?

ALOSIUS. What Bacon?

LETITIA. Bacon says: "A crowd is not company; and faces are but a gallery of pictures; and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love." Oh, Professor, don't you feel the truth of that? (JACK saunters in from the billiard room) Ah, here is another author man. Mr. Crandall, this is Mr.—Professor—Doctor Bartholomew.

(JACK and ALOSIOUS shake hands.)

ALOSIUS. (*Eyeing JACK suspiciously*) You are a writer?

JACK. Yes, I write for a living, but——

ALOSIUS. That's it. That's it. I, too, write for a living. We don't get our positions, we professors, because we can teach, but because we are the makers of many books. I am now writing ten thousand words a day. Do you wonder I am a nervous wreck? I——

(*Enter MRS. HOOKER.*)

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, Alosius, I am so glad to see you, and so sorry Floy can't see any one this evening——

(*Enter FLOY from the staircase, in another gown more ravishing than the preceding one.*)

FLOY. Why, Mother, I am always at home to Alosius. *you flatter me*

ALOSIUS. *Tu me flatte, Mademoiselle.* As I was just telling your father,—curious that we have not met before—I——

MRS. HOOKER. Not so very curious, Alosius. This is the first time in years that Father and I have been home at the same time. Not that we are applying for a divorce, or anything of that sort, but he has so many clubs, conventions, banquets and what not, and I so many social obligations, that, although we sometimes manage to go out together, we're never at home together.

(*JACK jots down some notes.*)

ALOSIUS. Precisely. Modern conditions. Everybody is a specialist—which reminds me of the book

I am writing. It is entitled, "The Quintessence of Americanism."

FLOY. Have you put me in it, Alosius?

ALOSIUS. You, Floy, are the American girl, and therefore you defy analysis, but I have summed up the debutante, as follows: breakfast party, bridge, luncheon, tea, dinner, theater, dance, supper with a spectacular orgy while you eat,—all in twenty-four hours. Not exaggerated?

FLOY. You have left out an occasional shopping tour and a dash of philanthropy. ~~A bud's business is to have a good time, and why shouldn't she?~~ I have had a pretty full schedule, but I love it. I am not bored.

JACK. Do you realize what it will all lead to, if you keep up this wild pace?

FLOY. More good times. It's like a snow ball—the more you roll it—

JACK. No, I'll tell you the goal: insanity, crime.

FLOY. (*Turning her back on JACK*) Unfortunately you have hit upon Mr. Crandall's hobby, but I am interested in your point of view, because you know what you are talking about. Poor Mr. Crandall is like an Adam emerging from his Eden, or a Rip VanWinkle from his sleep. (*Facing JACK*) Please don't take notes. I feel as awkward as though I were posing for a moving picture.

JACK. Beg pardon, I am not usually so rude, but this is all so extraordinary—

FLOY. I presume you are going to put us in a novel.

JACK. Yes.

LETITIA. Oh, what will be the title, Mr. Crandall? Do tell us.

JACK. I think I shall call it "The Driving of Jehu".

FLOY. I am interested in your book, Alosius.

Tell me some more about "The Quintessence of Americanism."

ALOSIUS. (*Standing behind a table, as though he were deliverinc a lecture*) I begin with statistics. There is nothing so impressive nowadays as statistics. It doesn't matter whether they are true or not, but statistics we must have. So I begin with our greatest extravagance. We prate about being a dry nation, while we are spending two billions of dollars a year for intoxicating liquors—that's a fact. ~~Then comes~~ tobacco, a close second, with a one billion two hundred million dollar output. Tobacco is your genuinely American product. Strange, when we stop to think of it, how we all make chimneys of ourselves, in emulation of the red man, even our smart society women following suit. ~~Third comes~~ jewelry, with only eight hundred million dollars. Next, in order of expenditure, are automobiles, home churches, confectionery, temperance drinks, tea and coffee and patent medicines, while at the foot of the list, at a mere thirteen millions each, there is a tie between foreign missions and chewing gum.

JACK. You all might like to add to your statistics these facts. First, immediately before the war, for every death from accident or violence in all Europe there have been six in the United States. Second, during the next ten years the cosmopolis of the world, New York City, will burn five hundred million dollars' worth of buildings and their contents. Third, the single state of Arkansas for one year has reported more murders than the whole dominion of Canada. What does it all mean? Haste, waste, madness.

FLOY. Mr. Crandall, you should have been a preacher.

ALOSIUS. I'm going to put that in my "Quintessence of Americanism". In America, everybody is his own preacher; accordingly nobody goes to

church. Not bad, that, struck off at Rooseveltian random, as it were.

FLOY. I know why you men—Father and Mr. Crandall and yourself—are all down on this age. You are all a part of the hurry—even Mr. Crandall from Texas—but you all rebel. That is because you are men. Women are more adaptable. Now Mother and I like to be doing things all of the time.

ALOSIUS. Yes, but I——

FLOY. Let us go into the study, Alosius. It is quiet there and I want to hear more about your book. *(Exeunt FLOY and ALOSIOUS, chatting, his "I" reverberating amid the conversational din. Exeunt STEVE, TED and LETITIA into the billiard room, where music and laughter are heard. JACK sits dejectedly in a corner)*

MR. HOOKER. *(To MRS. HOOKER, not noticing JACK)* Suppose she should marry that Alosius of yours? That would be worse than the poor house.

MRS. HOOKER. He is not my Alosius, but he is a very affable and efficient man. He has been directing the dispensation of my charity funds and he has suggested what I should say at the Board of Directors' meetings at the Settlement House.

MR. HOOKER. Yes, but——

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, there is no doubt about his efficiency, Father. I learned that word from him. He is director of the State Bureau of Labor, and——

MR. HOOKER. For heaven's sake, Sally, don't tell me any more things that he does. You might as well name the fifty-seven organizations I belong to. What will I belong to after to-morrow? Sally, I—I can't bear to be a has-been. It would be better for you if you had my life insurance.

MRS. HOOKER. Jim, don't talk that way. You are breaking my heart. *(Turning to JACK)* He is tired, Jack. He doesn't know what he is saying.

MR. HOOKER. Beg pardon, Jack. Didn't know you were here. Thought we were alone. Guess I will go to my room and rest a bit. Good-night, Sally. (*He kisses her*)

MRS. HOOKER. Why, Jim, a second time to-day! You are not yourself. (*She almost breaks down*)

MR. HOOKER. Well, I won't offend again. Good-night, Mother.

JACK. What you need is a rest, sir.

MR. HOOKER. (*Going up stairs*) Yes, all I need is a rest, rest. (*Exit MR. HOOKER up stairs*)

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, Jack—we got so well acquainted last winter, I call you Jack without thinking. You don't mind, do you?

JACK. (*Taking her hand and sitting beside her*) Nothing I like better.

MRS. HOOKER. You are such a comfort. You seem just like a son to me. Oh, I didn't mean anything by that. I—we are so awfully upset to-night. I have half a mind to tell you all about it.

JACK. I wish you would. Maybe I could help you all.

MRS. HOOKER. Yes, I believe I will. No, no, I can't. Jack, I like you. You are not a bit like an author.

JACK. Thank you.

MRS. HOOKER. Why didn't you tell us you were one?

JACK. Because that was an avocation. By profession I am a bronco buster.

MRS. HOOKER. There's nothing in your stories, I'll warrant, as queer as in our lives this minute. Truth is always stranger than fiction. That's why I don't take the time to read fiction.

JACK. Tell me your troubles. Do you know, I almost call you "Mother"? I never knew my mother and you——

MRS. HOOKER. There, boy, I will tell you. But

it is all so impossible. To begin with, Aunt Sophia is highly improbable. She was a spinster, a very spinsterish spinster. She had a warm heart. She should have been a mother.

JACK. But what has Aunt Sophia to do with your husband's failure?

MRS. HOOKER. Failure? Is it known? Who told you?

JACK. I couldn't help overhearing what he just said.

MRS. HOOKER. Well, that is to-morrow. But to-night—Oh, I can't tell you, Jack.

JACK. To get back to Aunt Sophia——

MRS. HOOKER. Well, Aunt Sophia is dead, and she left a will which specified that her fortune, something over a million, should go to Floy, if she is engaged before midnight to-night and is married before a year from to-night. Otherwise it will all go to a home for spinsters. Aunt Sophia was engaged, but——

JACK. The will specifies that Floy must be engaged before this midnight?

MRS. HOOKER. Yes, because to-morrow she is twenty-one.

JACK. Does Floy know about the will?

MRS. HOOKER. Nothing.

JACK. And you all expect the financial crash to-morrow, you say?

MRS. HOOKER. Yes.

JACK. And is Miss Floy engaged?

MRS. HOOKER. (*Looking apprehensively at the study door*) No, that is, not that I know of.

JACK. I am afraid that I can't help you out, after all, Mrs. Hooker.

MRS. HOOKER. Yes, you can. Jack, sit down. I am sick of being an American parent.

JACK. I beg pardon?

MRS. HOOKER. We parents don't dare say our

souls are our own, in the presence of our children. We let them marry counts or no-accounts, and muddle their love affairs generally, when just a word from us might set everything right—just a word. Sometimes I wish I were French. Jack, you are an unconventional young man, you say. Let me be unconventional, too. Why don't you propose to Floy to-night?

JACK. Don't you see that your revelation makes that out of the question?

MRS. HOOKER. I see nothing of the sort. Now I am speaking frankly. I never can get any information from my own children, but perhaps you can tell me. Weren't you engaged to Floy last winter?

JACK. Yes.

MRS. HOOKER. Just what I suspected. And now the engagement is broken.

JACK. How did you know that?

MRS. HOOKER. Who wouldn't? Now, my dear boy, why not renew it? I think Floy really cares for you, but she is very impulsive. (*Glancing at the study door*) She needs a steadying influence like yours.

JACK. Mrs. Hooker, I—I can't discuss this.

MRS. HOOKER. You still care for her, Jack. I know you do.

JACK. Yes. And I intend to win her.

MRS. HOOKER. Then you will. Oh, Jack, you dear boy, I am so happy. I feel as though I were engaged myself.

JACK. But not to-night.

MRS. HOOKER. And why not to-night?

JACK. Surely you understand. It is a matter of honor. I could not take advantage of Floy in this way. I—don't you see?—I care for her, not her money.

MRS. HOOKER. Why not have both? Now, Jack, don't think me crafty and calculating, but really,

aren't your southern ideals of honor and chivalry impractical?

JACK. I'd feel a cad the rest of my life, if I urged my suit to-night, after knowing the real situation.

MRS. HOOKER. Then I made a mistake in telling you?

JACK. Sorry, Mrs. Hooker.

MRS. HOOKER. I gave you credit for more common sense. Do you realize that you are sacrificing all of us—not simply Floy—but her family, yes, and your family, too,—all because of your perverted sense of honor? If you didn't love her, it would be different.

JACK. That is why I can't urge her to-night. I reckon I'd better be takin' my departure now.

MRS. HOOKER. And leave the field to Alosius? Hadn't you better hang around on the outskirts, Jack?

JACK. I wish I could help you all.

(Enter FLOY and ALOSIUS from the study, and LETITIA, STEVE and TED from the billiard room.)

LETITIA. Oh, Mr. Crandall and Mr. Bartholomew, learn the latest dance. The boys are teaching us. It is a dream.

STEVE. A scream.

LETITIA. It is called the Ice Slip. *(Exeunt, chatting, LETITIA, TED, JACK and ALOSIUS to billiard room)*

FLOY. What is the matter, Mother? You look a bit fagged.

MRS. HOOKER. Not a bit, Floy, but I guess I'll go and finish that play of Shaw's I was reading. He always rests me, he makes me so mad. Speak-

ing of Shaw, why don't you imitate his heroines? Lots of nice girls do.

FLOY. Mother, what do you mean by that?

MRS. HOOKER. Well, Floy, now don't be shocked. Why don't you propose to Jack?

FLOY. Mother, I am not shocked, but I am surprised at you—disgusted. Please understand: I don't need to run after men, and as for Mr. Crandall, I shall have nothing more to do with him, nothing. If you have been giving him any false impressions—

MRS. HOOKER. I give it up. (*Exit MRS. HOOKER in the study*)

FLOY. What is the matter with Mother?

STEVE. Well, I don't know as that's such a bad idea of hers about a girl's proposing.

FLOY. Oh, Steve, what do you know about proposals?

STEVE. I've received many proposals myself, Sis. But do you know there is a fellow here to-night, in this very house, who is sizzling, boiling, busting with—with ardor for you.

FLOY. Don't be silly.

STEVE. I am not the silly one. He is. He told me all about it.

FLOY. Why, if he is in such a desperate condition, does he interview little brother? I could put him out of his agony directly. All you have to do to make a man perfectly happy is to say No.

STEVE. But he is too modest to pop the question. He—he doesn't think he is worthy of you.

FLOY. Who is this phenomenon?

STEVE. Ted Stone.

FLOY. Ted Stone? (*Laughing merrily*) Why, Steve boy, how could you get such a hallucination? It was only a few moments ago that I first set eyes on Ted Stone's imposing contour.

STEVE. His what? This is a case of love at first

sight. You're badly hit, too, I can see that. You can't fool me. All the girls are wild about him. There never has been such a left guard, Sis.

FLOY. Oh, brother mine, do you think that great big heart of his is cracked, shattered by little me? *(She laughs delightedly)*

STEVE. Yes, and I don't see anything to laugh about. No use of procrastination in these matters. Why don't you do the Shaw heroine act? Mater is right. But she picked the wrong man.

FLOY. Steve, I'd like to shake you. What do you mean, you and Mother, by pestering me in this way? I thought one night at home would be a rest. All I've had dinned in my ears since my coming out party has been men, men, men, marriage, marriage, marriage, hurry, hurry, hurry,—but I certainly expected better things from you and Mother. What is your game, any way?

STEVE. Don't be frivolous, Sis. This is serious.

FLOY. Why serious? Afraid I'll be an unhappy old maid, as Aunt Sophia was? Just because I'm twenty-one to-morrow? There are lots of older girls. Don't you worry, little boy, about my stock on the matrimonial market. You and Mother are not exactly flattering. Dad wouldn't be so anxious to dispose of me to the first comer.

STEVE. You're right there. Dad expressly stipulated—Oh! I mean——

FLOY. What did Dad stipulate?

STEVE. Oh, nothing.

FLOY. Steve, I've felt all the evening there is something happening I don't know anything about. Nobody acts natural. Everybody is matrimonially crazy. What is in the air?

STEVE. Sis, take my advice, and ask no questions. Ted Stone——

FLOY. What does it mean?

STEVE. It means, Sis, you've got to be engaged

to-night. You may as well understand first as last, and you can't find a huskier, handsomer man than Ted Stone. I've lived in the same dormitory with him, next door, for a whole half year, and I know him through and through. He is a brick, solid, on the square, and, what's more, he is willing to marry you on the spot.

FLOY. He is willing? I am overcome with gratitude. Steve, you ought to be in the kindergarten. What do you mean by this nonsense? What has put this ridiculous idea in your head that I have to be engaged to-night? Twenty-one isn't too old, for matrimony,—no, nor sixty-one these days.

STEVE. If you aren't engaged before midnight, you lose Aunt Sophia's million.

FLOY. Do you think you are going to bully me into favoring this sausage-faced paragon of yours? As for Aunt Sophia, I happen to know that she left everything to me—not that it matters.

STEVE. Only on one condition. (*He opens the desk, and shows her the will, pointing to the passage*)

STEVE. Read that passage. See for yourself.

FLOY. (*Having read it*) Poor old Aunt Sophia. Well I think the superannuated spinsters ought to have a good home.

STEVE. So ought we.

FLOY. We have.

STEVE. To-morrow—good-bye everything.

FLOY. Steve, please, don't joke like that.

STEVE. To-morrow the firm busts, and Dad says he won't have a cent in the world. No joke.

FLOY. Steve, it's cruel of you to—(*She almost faints, but regains control of herself. STEVE leads her to a chair*)

STEVE. There, there, Sis, sorry I told you. I always make a mess of everything.

FLOY. You did right, Steve, old boy. I should

know. That is why Dad has been so disturbed all the evening and Mother so queer. That's what she meant about getting engaged to Jack. Ridiculous. He—he doesn't care about me, nor I him.

STEVE. But there is Ted Stone. He is right there with the goods. Don't look so scornful. He is pretty near as old as you. And you don't have to ask him if you don't want to. I'll do it for you. You see, he's too bashful. But I'll be the go-between, the way they do in Japan. (*Calling from billiard room door*) Ted, come here a minute.

FLOY. Steve, I'd marry a tadpole sooner than this Ted of yours.

(*Enter TED STONE, blushing. STEVE makes pantomimic insinuations, behind FLOY. TED tries to escape, but STEVE pushes him forward and himself disappears.*)

TED. Did you call?

FLOY. No.

TED. Neither did I, that is, I mean— Guess I started without the signal— You know when I came here I thought you was the pretty girl—of course you are pretty, too—but I thought you was that real pretty girl with the white apron and cap and curls and things. Gee, she is a peach. Of course you are a peach, too,—I mean, I thought you was her and she was you and I—I—say, I can't do all the talking. You've got the ball now—touch down! Touch down. Stone wall!

FLOY. (*Glancing at him icily from the will she is perusing*) I beg your pardon, Mr. Stone?

TED. The pleasure is mine—er, I mean—I'd like to meet the guy with a pail of water and a sponge. Time out. Say, I'm so floosy I don't know whether I am making a drop kick or an off side

play—I feel like a fly on the fly paper. I don't know whether I am going or coming.

FLOY. Will you do me a favor?

TED. (*Mopping his brow*) I'd like to—I—I'd like to, but, you see, I don't belong in this game. I am just a substitute. Honest, I don't think I am your man.

FLOY. Mr. Stone, will you do me a great favor?

TED. Well, since you put it that way,—yes.

FLOY. Leave me alone. That is all I ask. I haven't had a waking moment alone for months and months. I must have a chance to think. You don't mind leaving me?

TED. Nothing I'd rather do, that is, I didn't mean that exactly. I mean, I'd rather do what you don't want me to do. No, I don't want me to do what you want me to do. I—don't want to do what you want me to do. I—Oh, gosh! (*TED edges away sheepishly, then lifts his feet and vanishes*)

—FLOY. (*Examining the will, unconscious of TED'S departure*) Mr. Stone—(*ALOSIUS hurries in from the billiard room. Finding FLOY alone, he poses himself back of her, leaning against a table*) To use your own figure of speech, aren't you still on the fly paper?

(*ALOSIUS springs from the table in agitation, but regaining his poise, approaches FLOY sentimentally.*)

ALOSIUS. Maiden meditation, fancy free.

FLOY. On the contrary, I am thinking of business.

ALOSIUS. Business, that's my motto. Efficiency, business.

FLOY. (*Toying with the will*) This is unusual business. It is a will.

ALOSIUS. Law suit pending?

FLOY. No.

ALOSIUS. I take it that you are concerned.

FLOY. You take it correctly, Alosius. Perhaps you would like to examine this.

ALOSIUS. The law is not my specialty. We are all specialists, you know. Indeed, I treat only one small branch of my own field of investigation—I—

FLOY. There is something here which is your specialty. *Alosius sits*

ALOSIUS. How so?

FLOY. "Business, efficiency." Just read that short paragraph. (*He does so with amazement*) You seem surprised.

ALOSIUS. Astounded.

FLOY. What do you advise me to do?

ALOSIUS. When are you twenty-one?

FLOY. At midnight, to-night.

ALOSIUS. You are contemplating breaking the will?

FLOY. No, I shouldn't want to do that. Queer as Aunt Sophia was, I have respect for her wishes. Besides, we have no money with which to fight it.

ALOSIUS. You have no money! Pardon my surprise. It is only college professors who have a right to such rash statements. Now if I had said that I had no money, I—

FLOY. To-morrow you and everybody will know that Father has failed. We shall have nothing unless—

ALOSIUS. Unless?

FLOY. Unless I—

ALOSIUS. I see. Bankruptcy—who would have thought it? Curious will, that, very curious. She must have wanted awfully to get married, your aunt, I mean. She must have wanted it as badly—as I have wanted to get married.

FLOY. You?

ALOSIUS. Yes, as I do want to, if I can find the

right girl. Slow and sure has been my motto in these matters. I have been engaged three times already.

FLOY. Oh!

ALOSIUS. Yes, three times. Each of the girls young, winsome, wealthy. A professor with no independent income, with all of his wealth in his brains, as you might say,—well, a professor, I——

FLOY. A professor must not neglect the money end of matrimony?

ALOSIUS. Quite right.

FLOY. Then why don't you marry one of the three elect?

ALOSIUS. All married and have babies.

FLOY. Then their hearts aren't broken?

ALOSIUS. I've often wondered. Have you had—er—any such affairs, may I ask?

FLOY. Yes, you may ask. No, I haven't had any such affairs as you have had. Isn't there an old saying that women love but once?

ALOSIUS. (*Drawing the portieres*) And "men were deceivers ever, one foot on land and one on shore"——

FLOY. (*Anticipating his intention*) Oh, please don't take the trouble to kneel.

ALOSIUS. You have had experience too?

FLOY. Oh, yes, I have had proposals walking, riding, sailing, swimming, even one in an aeroplane, but kneeling is really out of date.

ALOSIUS. The youngest of mine liked it.

FLOY. But she belonged to another generation.

ALOSIUS. To come to the point.

FLOY. Yes, let us talk business, Alosius.

ALOSIUS. Why not mix a little sentiment with the business?

FLOY. Nonsense. I feel as though we were married already, Alosius, our relations are so prosaic.

ALOSIUS. Then you will marry me? Floy, you——

FLOY. I don't know whether I will or not. Let us talk it over.

ALOSIUS. Your moods are so disconcerting, Floy. How you have changed.

FLOY. Yes, I have been a silly young girl, but now I am a thinking woman. I want to strip off all sentimentality from this relationship, Alosius, because there isn't any sentiment in it.

ALOSIUS. You don't like me?

FLOY. Oh, yes, Alosius, I like you well enough.

ALOSIUS. I adore——

FLOY. Please don't use that word. It is passé. But it is getting late. (*Glancing at the clock*) Let's get right down to brass tacks. I am willing to marry—at least I am considering—marrying a respectable man, who—You are respectable, aren't you?

ALOSIUS. Why,—er—yes, I think I might be called respectable.

FLOY. Well, I am considering such an alliance simply and solely to save my family from financial ruin. You, on the other hand, are looking for a nice girl with money. I am the nice girl and here (*Holding up the will*) is the money.

ALOSIUS. By gad, you are up to the minute.

FLOY. Well, time is flying. If you won't take up this proposition, I'll have to find somebody else before midnight. Is it a bargain? Hurry!

ALOSIUS. We'll seal the bargain with a kiss.

FLOY. No, no, no, don't you dare touch me. *gets up*

ALOSIUS. What kind of a bargain are you talking about?

FLOY. I don't know. Let me go. (*Struggling against his embrace*) Let me go, I say.

ALOSIUS. You have been playing with me long

enough, you coquette. But I know how to tame you.
FLOY. How dare you—how dare—Oh!

*(Enter JACK through billiard room portieres.
ALOSIUS quickly releases FLOY.)*

JACK. You blackguard. How dare you insult this lady? If it weren't for her presence, I'd knock you down, sir.

(Attracted by the commotion, all hurry in, with the exception of MR. HOOKER.)

ALOSIUS. It is you who owe the apology to everybody present, especially to Miss Hooker, for she has just consented to be my wife.

MRS. HOOKER. Engaged to you? *(Mother and daughter weep on each other's necks. Awkward pause)*

ALOSIUS. Well, this is highly complimentary. I feel overwhelmed by all of your congratulations.

LETITIA. Oh, I want somebody's shoulder to weep on. *(She joins the weeping chorus. A noise, as though of a pistol shot, is heard up stairs. Everyone is alert with alarm)*

MRS. HOOKER. Oh, it is your father! *(She totters and JACK catches her)*

STEVE. *(Springing toward the stairs)* A pistol shot! Dad, dad!

(MR. HOOKER in dressing gown comes down the stairs.)

MR. HOOKER. *(Yawning)* Just started to take a little nap when the wind banged that damned door. Oh, I beg pardon, ladies and gentlemen. Guess I am not quite awake. Sonny, mix me a high ball.

MRS. HOOKER. Jim, are you sure you are not hurt?

MR. HOOKER. Hurt? What you all looking so sad about?

MRS. HOOKER. Floy has just announced her engagement.

MR. HOOKER. Announced her engagement? My boy, (*Turning to JACK and clasping his hand*) you deserve her. I congratulate you. Lemme see, what time is it? (*He looks at his watch, holding it in his left hand, while still gripping JACK's hand with his right*) Half-past eleven. Bravo! On time, my boy, on time.

(*JACK seizes his hat and coat, and dashes out through the hall. The door is heard to bang.*)

Curtain

ACT III

SCENE: *Same as preceding ACT. No time is supposed to elapse between acts. The characters are grouped as at the end of ACT II. The outer door is heard to close as JACK departs.*

LETITIA. Poor dear Mr. Crandall, he looked so—so unhappy as he left. I am so sorry for him.

ALOSIUS. Personally, I must say I feel no regret at his departure.

FLOY. Mother, dear, don't cry any more.

MRS. HOOKER. The trouble is that this is so—so sudden. *stuck*

FLOY. Everything is sudden, you know, Mother, in these days.

LETITIA. Our arrival here, Mr. Stone, was so

sudden. Teehee! I skidded right into your arms, didn't I? It makes me think of Tagore. I don't know why. Some of his thrilling oriental things, you know. It was so——so elemental.

TED. Aw, you got the wind knocked out of you—that's all. Few minutes for time out, and now you're back in the game.

LETITIA. Your imagery is so—so futurist, Mr. Stone, you really ought to write poetry.

STEVE. Old Ted a poet! Ha, ha!

LETITIA. Why not. Modern poetry has so much dash in it, you know. Nothing is said. Everything is left to the imagination. By the way, Mr. Stone, would you mind seeing me home? I am sorry to trouble you, but—but I'm in such a hurry.

TED. It's not much trouble—it's no pleasure—I mean, it's a great trouble—delighted.

LETITIA. Thank you, funny boy. Good-night, Floy dear. It has been the loveliest party. Good-night, Mrs. Hooker, everything has been so—so beautifully unconventional. And where is Mr. Hooker?

STEVE. Having a smoke, I guess.

LETITIA. Say good-night for me. Or is it good-morning? It is nearly morning, isn't it? Oh, Floy, dear, I almost forgot— The very best of wishes. Will it be soon? I suppose so. You'll let me catch your bouquet, won't you?

FLOY. Let you carry it if you want to, in my place.

LETITIA. Floy, you are such a jester. I never can tell when you are in earnest. Won't it be something of a strain on you, Professor Bartholomew, keeping up with her repartee at the breakfast table? Good-night everybody. (*Everybody returns the salutation. Exit LETITIA into hall, abruptly. Re-enter LETITIA*) Come, my hero. (*Exit LETITIA. TED marches after her*)

FLOY. Good-night, Mr. Stone.

TED. Nightie, nightie. (*Exit TED into hall.*
Enter MR. HOOKER from the billiard room. STEVE
sings, "Good-night, Ladies.")

MR. HOOKER. Steve, stop that infernal noise.

STEVE. Gentle hint, Dad. When young love is enthroned, time for family to clear out.

ALOSIUS. Floy, may I have a word with you in the study?

FLOY. Yes, I want just about one word with you, Alosius.

(*They go into the study, ALOSIOUS closing the door.*)

MRS. HOOKER. What does it mean? Did either of you tell him?

STEVE. Not I.

MR. HOOKER. And I've been asleep—or trying to sleep.

MRS. HOOKER. Is it possible that he just happened to propose at this time of all times?

MR. HOOKER. What beats me is, why did she accept him?

MRS. HOOKER. I haven't breathed a word of our affairs to Floy, and yet she acts just like a martyr.

MR. HOOKER. I believe the little girl is sacrificing herself for our sakes.

MRS. HOOKER. But how would she get wind of our predicament?

(*STEVE begins to sing again.*)

MR. HOOKER. Steve, if you don't stop that, I'll have you muzzled.

STEVE. Why don't you break the engagement, Dad?

MR. HOOKER. What next?

STEVE. Easy enough. Just open that door, and say solemnly, "It's all off." Then beat a retreat.

MR. HOOKER. No, no, boy, you don't know what you are talking about.

STEVE. Dad, why not? It surely is not the million dollars you're considering? The more I think of it, I'd rather be poor but honest than to have Alosius for a brother-in-law.

MR. HOOKER. And I'd rather have a dozen failures than to have that failure for a son-in-law.

MRS. HOOKER. I am almost inclined to agree with you, Dad, but I don't know why. Alosius isn't a failure. He's unusually successful——

MR. HOOKER. He is too confoundedly successful.

MRS. HOOKER. Well, dear, we must get some rest. If only it had been Jack.

STEVE. Jack is a prince. He's as fine as Ted Stone, and a little older, too.

MR. HOOKER. Well, I suppose young people must manage their own affairs. They do, any way. Come, Sally.

MRS. HOOKER. Bedtime, Steve.

STEVE. No, Mater, I'm going to stay on the job. (*Capering about*) I am that merry wanderer of the night, who will sprinkle the magic juice of love-in-idleness in their eyes. (*In Puck fashion he frisks about, while the parents sadly climb the stairs, arm in arm. They disappear up the stairs and STEVE pirouettes into the billiard room. After a moment's pause, angry voices are heard in the study. The door bursts open and FLOY rushes out, followed by ALOSIUS*)

FLOY. Let me go, Alosius. Let me go, I say. I never was so insulted in my life.

ALOSIUS. How is it possible for me to insult you when we are engaged?

FLOY. If that is the way you feel about it, then

let it be understood we are not engaged. I never consented to your proposition any way.

ALOSIUS. *Semper mutabile femina est.* It was you who made the proposition. I accepted.

FLOY. You announced our engagement when there wasn't any. I made a strictly business proposition——

ALOSIUS. I accepted. Therefore we are engaged. Therefore I will have that kiss. Your coquetry is piquantly charming, Floy, but there is a limit.

FLOY. There is a limit. If you come any nearer to me, I'll tear your eyes out. Oh, we are all beasts, beasts. Just a thin veneer of refinement. Comes a big war or a big passion, and ouf! the civilization is stripped off like lightning. Now I have found out about myself. I'm a sleek sinewy tiger—that's what I am. Don't you come a step nearer. If you do, I'll claw you to pieces.

ALOSIUS. I am beginning to foresee a pleasant domestic existence. But I like you all the better when you are in a rage. *Floy enters*

FLOY. Alosius, see, I am sitting calmly in this chair. I am not in a rage. I repeat to you in the most matter-of-fact tone: our engagement—if we ever had an engagement—is broken, broken, broken.

ALOSIUS. I suppose I am now to learn once more of the feminine psychology which says No when it means Yes. It is a primitive method that a woman has of binding a man closely to her.

FLOY. Alosius, I never had any cannibalistic yearnings before, but I verily believe I could chop you up into little bits and eat you.

ALOSIUS. You really must dote on me, my dear. Well, here is my ultimatum: I am not going, sweetheart, until you give me that kiss. At least one. You are a naughty girl and I—— *points to the door*

FLOY. Can I speak more plainly? I thought of marrying you as a coldly business arrangement, *stands*

simply to save my family from ruin. ~~Forgive me that mercenary moment.~~ At any rate, I have been frank. And I am honest with you now when I tell you that I joyfully choose ruin for my loved ones and myself sooner than endure your society for another moment. Alosius, you force me to be rude. Have I hurt you?

ALOSIUS. You are a delight. In my three other affairs, I had no experience like this. You are champagne to my jaded nerves, exhilarating, ravishing. This role you have assumed is too preposterous, but it suits you well. Let me see, (*Glancing at his watch*) it is not yet midnight. I can wait for the mood to pass, and I will have that kiss, little charmer. ~~A man can't make too sure of a volatile spirit like yours.~~ Why—I—(*She stares at him in silent indignation, and he breaks off his voluble discourse, as STEVE enters from the billiard room, carrying a cue which he is chalking*)

STEVE. Have a game?

ALOSIUS. No thanks. I never play games—waste of time.

FLOY. Alosius and I are playing a little game right now. Don't go, Steve. You can help me. I—well, I suppose you would call it—I proposed to this man.

ALOSIUS. Yes, that is precisely what you would call it.

FLOY. On account of the will and the assignment. I explained it all to him as business, nothing but business, and now——

ALOSIUS. Now I have decided that much as I should like to help you and your family,—it was an instinct of chivalry that prompted me to accept, I daresay, but hard as it now seems to leave you stranded, I must think of myself, my career: my time must all be conserved, not dissipated. And so I am afraid I must break the engagement.

STEVE. Shall I kick him out, Sis?

FLOY. No, Steve, let him keep his fondest possession, his dignity.

ALOSIUS. As I was about to say, my home must be my workshop. You know what a time Carlyle had with a wealthy wife, notwithstanding his sound-proof study. I——

STEVE. You will find your hat and coat near the door.

ALOSIUS. Thank you. I trust there is no ill feeling. I wish you both good-night. (*Exit ALOSIUS. The door is heard to slam*)

FLOY. (*Bursting into peals of laughter, then imitating the heavy manner of ALOSIUS*) "I trust there is no ill feeling. I wish you both good-night. I——" Oh, Steve, switch off the lights, I can't bear to have you witness my humiliation.

(*STEVE switches off the lights, so that, except for the moonlight through the window and the fire-light, the room is in darkness. FLOY puts a log on the fire and squats down in front of it. STEVE lights his pipe and hugs his knees on the window seat.*)

STEVE. Lucky escape, Sis.

FLOY. Lucky escape from a million dollars. Steve, I am actually glad we are going to be poor.

STEVE. So am I. Be a new sensation.

FLOY. Yes, and it is going to simplify life such a lot. No more responsibilities and complexities and subtleties. We can do whatever we want to and not what other people want us to do.

STEVE. We'll find out who our friends are.

FLOY. It will be such fun to get a pay envelope instead of an allowance. I hate to lose our home, though. Suppose we'll have to room in a garret? Garret rooms can be awfully artistic.

STEVE. (*Looking through the window*) Queer thing happening across the street, Floy. Suspicious looking man walking back and forth watching our house. Wonder if it is a burglar.

FLOY. (*Joining STEVE at the window*) I hope it is a burglar who comes and burgles a lot. Then we can get the insurance.

STEVE. Mercenary. I am going to get a revolver.

FLOY. Oh, Steve, I saw his face under a lamp post. It—it is not a burglar.

STEVE. How do you know?

FLOY. Because it isn't a burglar's face.

STEVE. I can see him now, too. Why if it isn't—it is. It's Jack. I'll go and lasso the old scout.

FLOY. You'll do nothing of the sort, Steve.

STEVE. Why not?

FLOY. At this hour?

STEVE. That's just the point. There are only a few minutes before midnight, and you had better hustle and land him.

FLOY. Oh, Steve, is that what you think of your sister?

STEVE. Highest compliment I can pay you, because he is the finest fellow I know of, not excepting Ted Stone. And you do care for Jack. You did last year. You do still. Now, don't you?

FLOY. Steve!

STEVE. He cares for you too. He wouldn't be mooning around like this if he didn't. Here, let me call him before he gets away.

FLOY. (*Detaining him*) Please don't.

STEVE. Why not?

FLOY. Wait.

STEVE. Now, Sis, the one thing we can't afford to do is to wait. It's the old game of consequences: Her name, Sis; his name, Jack; they met in her house just before midnight; he said, "Will you be

mine?" she said, "Oh, yes!" and the consequences were they got a million dollars.

FLOY. And the world said, "What a scandal!" No, Steve boy, you don't understand. I couldn't make this a business proposition with Jack. I can't, I won't be engaged for money. I wouldn't be engaged before midnight, Steve. Nothing could induce me to. So you'll have to give up this little scheme.

STEVE. But there is nothing to prevent your being engaged after midnight. (*While she is not looking, STEVE pushes the hands of the clock on the mantel ahead fifteen minutes, making it midnight,—this act only half visible in the firelight. Then he prances about mischievously*)

FLOY. What are you doing, Steve?

STEVE. Going to get Jack.

FLOY. No, no, no, no.

STEVE. That sounds to me, Floy, like yes, yes, yes, yes. (*Exit STEVE through hall. The little clock on the mantel strikes twelve rapidly*)

FLOY. (*Sitting in front of the fire*) Twelve o'clock! And now I'm poor. I don't care.

(*Re-enter STEVE, followed by JACK.*)

JACK. (*Removing his ulster in the hall*) I just happened to be walking by. Lucky you saw me. You say you have something important to tell me?

(*STEVE draws the portieres as he disappears into the billiard room.*)

FLOY. Oh, is that you, Jack. How did you get in?

JACK. (*Entering*) Steve—Where is he? He wanted to tell me something.

FLOY. Probably that my engagement to Alosius is broken. Alosius broke it.

JACK. Is this some more of your coquetry, Floy?

FLOY. Don't you dare use that word, *coquetry*.

JACK. Then—then you will marry me? See, it is after midnight, honey. Say yes.

FLOY. So you know all about it, too?

JACK. Your mother told me.

FLOY. Oh, I hate this love and money mixture.

JACK. There's nothing left but love now, honey, and on that I'll kiss you. (*He sits on the arm of her chair, but she escapes his embrace*)

FLOY. No, we'll not begin this with kissing.

JACK. I reckon it will be the penalty imposed by the judge.

FLOY. This is a serious matter.

JACK. Kissing is a very serious matter.

FLOY. Marrying isn't a matter of kissing. It is a matter of temperament. I have a brain. Please give me credit for that.

JACK. Item: credit for one dear little brain.

FLOY. You are almost as odious as Alosius.

JACK. Puzzle: why did that little brain break our engagement? I can't remember.

FLOY. Jack, it isn't possible you have forgotten the cause of our rupture?

JACK. I remember you were terribly offended about something.

FLOY. And so were you.

JACK. But I don't know what it was all about.

FLOY. It was a totally different interpretation of life. It was what they call in the divorce court "incompatibility of temperament." But since then I have changed.

JACK. So have I.

FLOY. I have changed to-night.

JACK. And I've changed my mind since seeing you here to-night. This is your environment. You

should enjoy life to the full, honey, it is your right. On my hermitage on the plains I have not known anything about the social side of life. And I pretend to interpret men and women in my books when I don't know anything about them. I want to lead this life of yours. I want to taste it to the full. I want to go the pace with you, honey. ~~We'll sip the nectar of existence, we'll—~~

FLOY. Jack, you are delirious. You have lost your poise, lost all the good sense I have admired in you, and (*A sob*) just when I have had some sense knocked into me. I have gone this crazy pace and I know what I am talking about. I am glad to renounce it. I want poverty, work, fresh air—

JACK. You little Epicurean, now you are romancing.

FLOY. And you are philosophizing. With all of your southern chivalry, you are a Puritan at heart, Jack.

JACK. Puritan? Fiddlesticks! I want the life. I want to do something shocking.

FLOY. Jack, Jack, don't you realize, everybody wants to do something shocking nowadays and that is why there is nobody left to be shocked?

JACK. But I have just come to realize, honey, what you know: this is the biggest age of history and America the greatest country on the globe—why? Because we utilize every moment of our time. I've been thinking it out as I paced back and forth in front of your house. There is no leisure class here because there is no leisure. There never was a time or a country where so much is packed into a moment—business, art, pleasure. That is what gives zest and tang to living. That is what spells progress.

FLOY. There never was a time or a country—you quoted statistics yourself to prove it—with such a horrible record of crime and insanity. There is a

difference between accomplishment and activity, Jack, between nerve and nervousness. Oh, Jack, I do care for you. Let's go back to the plains of Texas and ride our ponies and be carefree. That is the way to live.

JACK. Dearest, you wouldn't be carefree. You'd be a drudge. We would grow stale. The monotony——

FLOY. But in the city you are a machine,—no, a cog in the machine, grinding day and night.

JACK. A compromise, honey: half the year on my ranch, half the year in your city.

FLOY. How silly we are to be talking about the place to live. Now we'll have to earn a living wherever we can, and I don't care where, so long as I have you. *(They start to embrace, but they pause, as the chimes of the city clock are heard tolling twelve)* Why, Jack, it is just striking twelve now. *(Shaking her finger at the clock on the mantel)* I never knew our old clock to be ahead of time before, but maybe——

JACK. Maybe—Now, honey, you'll never have to worry and you'll never have to hurry.

FLOY. Hurry?

STEVE. *(Sticking his head through the billiard room portieres and making an impish grimace in the firelight)* Hurry! *(STEVE, laughing, disappears behind the portieres. FLOY and JACK laugh and embrace)*

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